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COMMANDERS DIGEST

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE • WASHINGTON, D.C.

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NATIONAL WEEK OF CONCERN FOR AMERICANS WHO ARE PRISONERS OF WAR OR MISSING IN ACTION

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA — A PROCLAMATION —

1,623 American servicemen and some 50 U.S. civilians are now either missing in action or being held captive by North Vietnam and its allies. At the end of this month, the first men to be taken prisoner will begin their ninth year in captivity. This is the longest internment ever endured by American fighting men; it is also one of the most brutal.

The POW/MIA story of this long and difficult war is a tragic one:

The enemy continues adamant in his refusal even to identify all the Americans being held. He continues to flout the Geneva Prisoner of War Convention which establishes minimum humane standards for treatment of prisoners—a treaty to which North Vietnam is a signatory, just as are South Vietnam and the United States and 128 other nations. He continues to block impartial inspection of the prison camps. He continues to deny repatriation for seriously sick and wounded prisoners. He continues to ignore the prisoners' right to regular correspondence with their families.

And so those families suffer in spirit hardly less than their men suffer in the flesh. They live in a nightmare of unremitting anguish and gnawing concern. Many cannot even know whether their loved ones are still alive; those who do know this much, must live with their additional knowledge of the cruel conditions in which the prisoners exist.

Each new chapter in this outrage has stiffened the American people's determination to see justice done. We have stood and will continue to stand united as a nation in our concern and compassion for the prisoners and missing men. We mean to see this matter through.

Concern for the prisoners' plight, moreover, has spread to the people of goodwill around the world —and we may be confident that their humanitarian efforts, though so far rebuffed as callously as our own, will still continue as steadfastly as our own.

The United States has spared no effort—by diplomacy, by negotiation, by every other means—to secure fair treatment of our captive sons and brothers and to obtain their ultimate freedom.

As we set aside a special week of national concern for this continuing tragedy, and a special day of prayer for its resolution, we do so with a determination to persist in this effort—for principle, for peace, for the sake of these brave men and their parents and brothers and sisters and wives and the children some have never seen.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RICHARD NIXON, President of the United States of America, as requested by the Congress in Senate Joint Resolution 189, do hereby designate the period of March 26 through April 1, 1972, as National Week of Concern for Prisoners of War/Missing in Action, and Sunday, March 26, 1972, as a National Day of Prayer for the lives and safety of these men.

I call upon all the people of the United States to observe this week with such appropriate ceremonies and activities as will stir and sustain widespread concern for the missing men and prisoners, nourish the patient courage of their loved ones, and—above all—hasten the day of their safe return to home and freedom.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this tenth day of March, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred seventy-two, and of the Independence of the United States of America the one hundred ninety-sixth.

RICHARD NIXON

Defense Secretary's Message Cites National Week Of Concern

Following is the text of a message from Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird to the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces for a National Week of Concern:

"President Nixon has proclaimed the period March 26 through April 1, 1972, as a National Week of Concern for American Prisoners of War and Missing in Action, and Sunday, March 26, 1972, as a National Day of Prayer.

"The Presidential proclamation accompanied the signing of a Joint House-Senate Resolution passed by the Congress of the United States.

"During this National Week of Concern, thousands of U.S. military personnel throughout the world will participate in commemorative activities and pay special tribute to the continuing sacrifices of our captured and missing and their families. At the Pentagon, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer and I will participate in a special ceremony on Wednesday, March 29, together with representatives from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps.

"In these actions, we join with President Nixon, our Commander-in-Chief, the Congress, and the American people in demonstrating our support and concern for the men who are prisoners of war or missing in action in Southeast Asia. And, we once again express to North Vietnam our united determination to demand humane treatment and compliance with the provisions of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War."

PW/MIA Issue

U.S. Foreign Policy (1971) Report Of The Secretary of State

Captured and Missing Americans. The fate of 1,600 American servicemen and some 40 civilians captured or missing in Southeast Asia was of the highest concern to the U.S. Government during the past year. However, exhaustive efforts of the Government of Vietnam and the United States to resolve or alleviate this issue in a humanitarian way met with rebuffs and evasions from North Vietnam and its allies.

At the Paris meetings, the United States and South Vietnam renewed earlier offers to arrange the release of all prisoners of war in Indochina as well as the partial exchange offer of more than 8,500 North Vietnamese Army prisoners of war for all U.S. and allied prisoners of war along with the South Vietnamese captives held outside of South Vietnam.

As a matter of special urgency the United States and the GVN pressed vigorously for the repatriation of seriously sick and wounded prisoners of war, a step specifically required by the 1949 Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war.

South Vietnam also proposed interning sick and wounded as well as long-held prisoners of war in a neutral country. The neutral internment proposal prompted several nations to offer their services should Hanoi express its willingness. Unfortunately North Vietnam and its allies denounced these humanitarian efforts as "maneuvers."

Nonetheless, the GVN released across the Demilitarized Zone 37 sick and wounded North Vietnamese prisoners of war in January 1971. In May the Republic of Vietnam with our support offered to return all sick and wounded North Vietnamese prisoners of war. Arrangements for the repatriation went forward, and North Vietnam announced apparent readiness to receive the prisoners. However, the great majority of the prisoners indicated unwillingness to accept repatriation when interviewed by delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Such a procedure is required by the Geneva Convention in the case of repatriation of sick and wounded prisoners of war before the cessation of hostilities. The prisoners willing to accept repatriation were aboard a ship off the coast of North Vietnam when Hanoi broadcast a further statement refusing to accept them. The contrast between the approaches of the United States and GVN and that of Hanoi to the prisoner-of-war question was brought out sharply by U.S. and South Vietnamese offers and actions.

The United States in 1971 directed special efforts at obtaining information about the more than 800 Americans missing in Laos, South Vietnam, and Cambodia. Communist authorities, however, rebuffed repeated approaches on this subject, which were made through private as well as diplomatic channels. North Viet-

nam and its allies also maintained their steadfast refusal to permit impartial inspection of their prisoner of war camps, as required by the Geneva Convention. The number of letters from U.S. prisoners dropped sharply in 1971 compared with 1970, with many acknowledged prisoners in North Vietnam not heard from through most of the year. A number of letters from U.S. prisoners, including for the first time 18 letters from men captured in South Vietnam, were received shortly before Christmas. There continues to be no mail at all from U.S. prisoners captured in Laos or Cambodia, and from the majority of those believed captured in South Vietnam.

Despite the other side's evasion of humanitarian standards, the United States and Republic of Vietnam continued to discharge their responsibilities under the Geneva Convention for the more than 35,000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong prisoners of war. Delegates and doctors of the International Committee of the Red Cross continued their regular inspections of prisoner of war facilities in South Vietnam, and the prisoners were given the other rights prescribed by the Convention. In November 1971 the Government of Vietnam announced the release of almost 3,000 Viet Cong prisoners of war in South Vietnam, bringing the total released to well over 4,000.

The United States will press its efforts to secure the earliest release of all captured Americans as well as the fullest possible accounting for our citizens missing in Southeast Asia.

DoD Annual Report Lists PW/MIA Violations

Geneva Convention Requirements Listed in the FY 1973 DoD Annual Report to Congress as Having Been Violated by Hanoi:

- That prisoners be humanely treated and protected. This provision has been consistently violated.
- That neutral inspection of prisoner camps be permitted, including interviews of the prisoners without witnesses in attendance. The enemy has never permitted such inspection or such interviews.
- That the names of all prisoners be released promptly. Such names as the enemy has released have not been released promptly nor through regular channels.
- That notification of deaths in captivity and full information on the circumstances and place of burial be furnished. The enemy has not furnished any information about circumstances of death and place of burial.
- That prisoner of war camps be marked clearly and their location be made public. The enemy has not marked its camps nor divulged their location.
- That the seriously sick and wounded be repatriated or interned in a neutral country. The enemy has refused to comply with this provision.
- That prisoners be permitted to send at least two letters and four cards a month. The average has been two or three letters a year and none at all from some prisoners.
- That sufficient food must be given to prisoners. Yet, all the released prisoners have been found to be underweight and suffering from malnutrition.
- That prisoners not be held in close confinement. Yet, the enemy has held some men in solitary confinement for years.

USAF Chief Of Staff Statement On PW/MIA

Our daily activities consume so much of our thought and energy, we tend to push aside those responsibilities which we are not directly charged to accomplish. But there is one responsibility that no American should push aside —our responsibility to American POWs, MIAs, and their families. The President has proclaimed the week of 26 March as National Week of Concern for Prisoners of War/Missing in Action. These gallant men have earned and deserve our untiring efforts to seek their release—to let them know we have not forgotten them. We must not rest until they are again free men.

General John D. Ryan
Chief of Staff
U.S. Air Force

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES IN THE PW/MIA AREA

A. Department of Defense

GENERAL

Prior to January 1969, US Government approach on PW/MIA problem was one of "quiet diplomacy," involving principally efforts by the US Chief Negotiator in Paris, and by State through US Embassies with foreign countries. Public comments were held to a minimum.

In January-February 1969, DOD began considering a program to publicize the PW/MIA problem. The program was initiated in March 1969. It involved:

—Public statements by Government officials.

—Press conferences/speaking engagements by returnees.

—Enlisting assistance of news media.

—Encouraging private organizations, individuals and family members to participate in publicity generating activities.

Following are milestones in DOD's public affairs program:

3 March, 1969—Press release of Secretary Laird's 1 March 1969 memorandum to DOD Departments ordering inquiry to ensure that all possible help is given both PW/MIAs and their families, and initiating action to focus more public attention on prisoner problem.

19 May 1969—Press statement by Secretary Laird.

—Pointed out enemy mistreatment of PWs.

—Asked adherence to Geneva Convention.

19 May 1969—Press briefing on US Prisoners of War and Missing in Action Personnel.

—Hard hitting, illustrated and documented briefing on mistreatment of US PWs.

2 September 1969—Press conference in which two returned US prisoners reported on mistreatment of PWs.

2 September 1969—Press release by Secretary Laird, accusing Hanoi of mistreatment of PWs.

17 September 1969 through present:

—Numerous public comments and addresses by DOD officials.

—The Services have, through their Information Offices been very active in publicizing this issue. Public addresses by their Secretaries, Chiefs of Staff, and other officials and appearances by returnees have been made.

—DOD has responded to requests from private organizations and individuals and PW/MIA families who have asked for material and information to publicize the issue.

—The PW/MIA problem was given recognition at many major sports events with national TV coverage.

—DOD Armed Forces Information Office is pursuing a continuing information program on PW/MIAs.

29 November 1970—Son Tay PW rescue attempt.

May 1971—OSD and JCS provided representation to a Geneva Conference of Government Experts in international humanitarian law. Our major objective was to achieve better enforcement of the existing law for protection of war victims, including PWs.

26 March 1971—DOD PW/MIA Task Force was organized.

19-21 January—DOD Repatriation Planning Conference to update and refine existing plans.

IN BEHALF OF NEXT OF KIN

The primary responsibility for assisting next of kin of missing and captured servicemen rests with the military Services, which inform and help the families through frequent local base contacts and regular newsletters from the Service Headquarters.

Some efforts have been specifically fostered or assisted by OSD:

Summer 1969—Special briefings for NOK at 17 locations around the country, involving OSD/PA, ISA and State Department representatives, based on May 19 news conference.

September 1969—Navy-sponsored tour of country to allow families to meet and hear returnees. The presentation was largely based on the September 2 news conference.

December 1969—Air Force-sponsored tour of country to present three returnees in a briefing for families about the conditions of captivity in North Vietnam.

December 12, 1969—DOD-sponsored meeting at the White House between President and 26 wives and mothers of PW/MIA.

May 1, 1970—OSD provided space-available airlift for families to attend Congressionally-sponsored Appeal for In-

ternational Justice in Washington, and also assisted the organizers.

May 1970—Army-sponsored tour of country, on which released and escaped prisoners of war briefed families on conditions of captivity in South Vietnam.

October 3/4, 1970—OSD provided space-available airlift, advice, assistance, and presentations for Annual Meeting of National League of Families in Washington.

June 1971—OSD sponsored tour of the country on which representatives of State and Defense Departments discussed matters of interest to the PW/MIA family members. Service representatives were present to discuss individual problems with family members.

September 27/28, 1971—OSD provided space-available airlift, advice, assistance, and presentation for the Second Annual Meeting of the National League of Families.

OPPORTUNISTS AND RUMORS

Widespread publicity given the PW/MIA issue has brought out the predictable group of opportunists and outright crooks. A continued series of rumors and reports of bizarre schemes to free the prisoners have been circulated over the past several years. Family members, particularly those active in publicity efforts, have had to be constantly on their guard to avoid being taken advantage of by those who sought to exploit the families for personal or political gain. State/Defense agencies have been most thorough in following up each report to insure that no possible tangible benefit to the men is overlooked.

B. The Congress

September 1969—House Special Order devoted to condemning enemy policy toward and treatment of PWs. Members of both Houses have made almost daily speeches and protests on and off the floor since that date.

November 1969—Hearings by House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on National Security Policy and Scientific Developments (Chairman Zablocki) to explore thoroughly PW/MIA problem and to consider several Concurrent Resolutions. Testimony was heard from State, Defense, and American Red Cross. HFAC later reported House Concurrent Resolution 454, which unanimously passed 91st Congress.

February 26, 1970—Public Law 19-200 signed, removing $10,000 ceiling on Uniformed Services Savings Deposit for PW/MIA.

March 1970—Hearings by House Armed Services Committee (Chairman Rivers) on problems of PWs and their families. Testimony heard from Defense and from five PW/MIA wives concerning the wives' trip around the world, looking for help and information on husbands.

April/May 1970—Hearings by Zablocki Subcommittee to consider resolutions introduced since November 1969, and to help bring attention to May 1 rally. Testimony heard from members of both Houses, PW/MIA wives, State, Defense, American Red Cross, and H. Ross Perot. HFAC reported House Concurrent Resolution 582, which passed both Houses.

June 24, 1970—Public Law 91-289 passed, authorizing $5.00 per diem for period spent in PW status without humane treatment or adequate food.

August 1970 to present—A continuing series of Congressmen and Senators have visited Paris and many have met with representatives of the PRG and DRV.

December 24, 1970—Public Law 91-584 signed, allowing wives or children to use the VA education and home loan guarantee benefits for which the PW/MIA is eligible.

March/April 1971—Hearings by Zablocki Subcommittee to explore the entire spectrum of opinions and issues involved in PW/MIA question. Testimony was taken from returned prisoners, wives and mothers of PW/MIA, Americans who have spoken to enemy representatives in Paris, representatives of

American Prisoners Of War And Missing In Action In Southeast Asia

(As Of Mar. 11, 1972)

COUNTRY	MISSING	CAPTURED	TOTAL
NORTH VIETNAM	411	388	799
SOUTH VIETNAM	456	96	552
LAOS	262	5	267
TOTALS	1,129	489	1,618

SERVICE	MISSING	CAPTURED	TOTAL
ARMY	353	75	428
NAVY	109	145	254
MARINE CORPS	90	25	115
AIR FORCE	577	244	821
TOTALS	1,129	489	1,618

STATISTICAL RECAPITULATION BY YEAR LOST

	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
Missing	4	54	204	226	294	176	85	79	7
Captured	3	74	97	179	95	13	12	11	5
TOTALS	7	128	301	405	389	189	97	90	12

the American Red Cross, Government and Defense Department spokesmen, Members of Congress, and peace group representatives.

August 1971—Hearings by Zablocki Subcommittee to document experiences of US servicemen released by or escaped from the Viet Cong in South Vietnam.

September 1971—Hearings by House Armed Services Committee to determine what further might be done to assist the prisoners and missing or their families.

November 24, 1971—Public Law 92-169 signed, amending Titles 37 and 38, USC, to promotions while in PW/MIA status effective for all purposes.

C. Diplomatic and Third Country Efforts

GENERAL

The President and Secretary of State have raised the prisoner of war issue with a large number of Foreign Ministers and Heads of State, including those of Finland, Sweden, France, Germany, Canada, the United Kingdom, Japan, Indonesia, India, Laos, Rumania, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and with the Pope. Lower level approaches have been made to these and many other countries.

NEUTRAL INTERNMENT

The US and GVN proposed the neutral internment of sick and wounded and long-held prisoners of war in neutral countries. The other side rejected the proposal but several foreign countries, both publicly and privately, offered their territory and facilities for internment.

BORMAN-KEGLEY TRIP, AUGUST 1970

Visited 14 countries: Moscow, Warsaw, Stockholm, Paris, Geneva, Belgrade, Algiers, Tehran, Delhi, Bangkok, Vientiane, Saigon, Hong Kong, and Tokyo. Found vast amount of sympathy, some general proffers of assistance. Probably warmest (and most surprising) reception was in Algiers, where Borman had long discussion with Boumedienne and Foreign Minister Bouteflika.

UNITED NATIONS

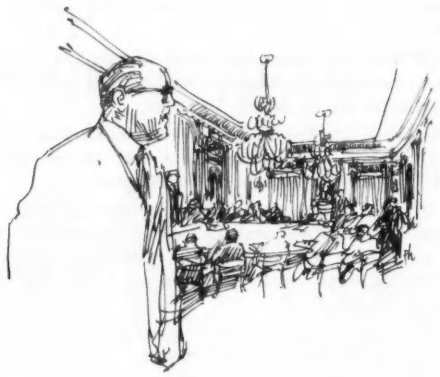
November 1969—Rita Hauser gave speech in Third Committee.

November 1970—Senator Pell gave speech in Third Committee.

November 1970—US introduced General Assembly Resolution, calling for inspection of all PW camps, as required by Geneva PW Convention, and urging compliance of all states with Article 109 of the Convention, which requires prompt repatriation of sick and wounded and suggests repatriation of internment in a neutral country of long term prisoners.

December 1970—General Assembly Resolution passed 60-16.

November 1971—Third Committee representative Admiral Alan Shepard reminded General Assembly of prior resolution and called for action to enforce.



D. Efforts in Paris Talks

1969—Ambassador Lodge touched on the PW issue in his remarks at his first session and returned frequently to the subject during his tenure as US Delegation Chief.

December 31, 1969—Ambassador Habib, as Head of our Delegation, devoted his entire opening statement to the PW/MIA issue. To highlight US demands for an accounting, he passed to the other side a list of all US servicemen missing and captured in Southeast Asia.

March 5, 1970—The President directed that Ambassador Habib give the highest priority to the prisoner problem, an instruction which continues in effect today.

August 1970—Ambassador Bruce reiterated the US position on the PW/MIA issue in his first session and frequently returned to the subject.

September 17, 1970—PRG "clarification" of its ten point proposal tied prisoner talks directly to agreement on US troop withdrawal by June 30, 1971.

October 7, 1970—President Nixon called for immediate release of PWs on both sides as a part of his 5 point plan. The other side's response has been negative so far.

December 17, 1970—DRV Chief Delegate stated that if June 30, 1971, date for US withdrawal not satisfactory, the US could propose another date for consideration.

July 1, 1971—PRG seven point "elaboration" of its previous proposals but advancing the date for US withdrawal to any date in 1971. Although the DRV/PRG has implied in private unofficial discussions that the prisoner question can be resolved separately from issues, the other side has maintained that all issues must be resolved together in official contacts.

November/December 1971—Major emphasis by US Delegation on DRV failure to perform on PW question, refusal to discuss its own proposals, and apparent inability to enter genuine discussions.

January 25, 1972—President Nixon revealed existence of private negotiations which were initiated on August 4, 1969 and made public his comprehensive 8-point peace plan, which was then presented by our side in Paris on January 27, 1972.

E. Efforts In and With Government of Vietnam

UNILATERAL RELEASES TO NORTH VIETNAM

November 1969—GVN offered to release 62 sick and wounded North Vietnamese prisoners to North Vietnam. Offer not accepted.

March 1970—GVN offered in Paris to release 343 sick and wounded.

June 1970—GVN announced intention to return 62 sick and wounded and 24 civilian seamen to North Vietnam if latter did not object.

July 1970—GVN carried out return of 62 sick and wounded and 24 civilian seamen to North Vietnam, by three one-way boats.

January 1971—GVN succeeded in returning 35 sick and wounded NVA to North Vietnam across the DMZ.

June 1971—GVN attempted to return 570 NVA PWs to North Vietnam. Although 660 PWs were interviewed by a neutral party, only 13 would agree to go and NVN cancelled the arrangements while the return operation was underway.

Total NVA repatriated to North Vietnam as of January 1972: 188.

CHIEU HOI

Prior to January 1970, 19 VC PWs were processed for release through the Chieu Hoi program. Between January 1970 and October 1971, an additional 764 VC PWs were "Chieu-Hoied." On the occasion of President Thieu's inauguration on October 31, 1971, he announced the release to Chieu Hoi status of an additional 2,299 VC PW.

Total PW released to Chieu Hoi: 3,082.

OTHER RELEASES IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Prior to January 1970—427 PWs
January 1970—September 1971—181 PWs
October 31, 1971—623 PWs
Total VC PWs released: 1,231

F. American Red Cross

The American Red Cross has attempted throughout the Vietnam War to be helpful in any way possible. The ARC has attempted to communicate directly with the NVN Red Cross on 11 occasions since 1966, and has received two replies.

September 1969—International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), at its Istanbul Conference, passed a resolution calling on all parties to provide to prisoners of war the full protections of the 1949 Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War.

September 1969—ARC brought the ICRC resolution to attention of all Red Cross Societies of the world and requested that they communicate with Hanoi in behalf of US servicemen held by the other side in Southeast Asia. Helpful responses were forthcoming in many cases.

October 1969—ARC wrote to almost 10,000 newspapers about the ICRC resolution and encouraged editorials based on the resolution in an effort to promote public understanding of the PW/MIA problem.

November 1969—ARC "Write Hanoi" campaign.

January 1970—ARC offered to send packages to PW/MIA when next of kin is unable or unwilling to do so.

May 8, 1970—ARC conducted second "Write Hanoi" campaign in conjunction with World Red Cross Day.

October 1970—provided administrative support for National League of Families' first annual meeting.

March 1971—ARC participated in an International Conference of Red Cross Societies, one objective of which was to find more effective means of enforcing the existing Geneva Conventions.

April 1971—cooperated with Reader's Digest in a third "Write Hanoi" campaign.

September 1971—provided administrative support for National League of Families' second annual meeting.

IN HIS COUNTRY'S SERVICE. Painting by Maxine McCaffrey, from the U.S. Air Force Art Collection.

PW/MIA PRAYER

O God of our Fathers who, from generation to generation, has watched over us in love, hear us now in our time of perplexity and need. We pray for our comrades who are prisoners of war and missing in action. They have borne the brunt of battle, endured the anguish of pain, imprisonment and loneliness, and we have too often forgotten their sacrifice. The callousness and coldness of our hearts distress us, O God, and we pray that you will forgive; rekindle within us as individuals and as a Nation a renewed dedication and commitment to those gallant men who have suffered so much.

Now we pray that they may not feel forsaken, but that they may know the certainty of Your love and Your presence, never doubting in the present darkness what You have told them in the light. Let not the flame of hope go out in their hearts but hasten the day when their burden will be lifted and they will be restored to their homes, their loved ones and freedom.

AMEN

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COMMANDERS DIGEST

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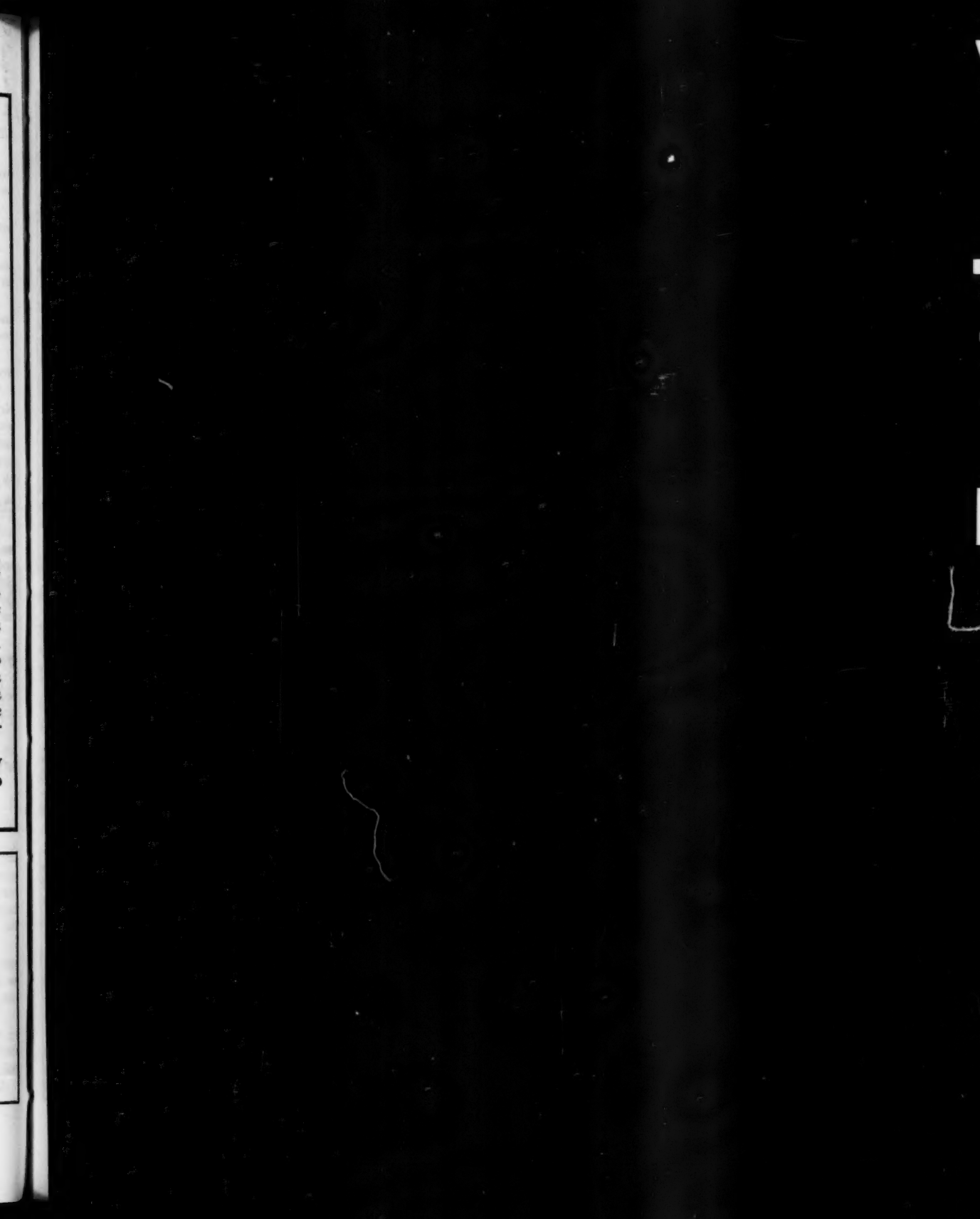
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